



STATE OF TENNESSEE

COMPTROLLER OF THE TREASURY

John G. Morgan

Comptroller

STATE CAPITOL

NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE 37243-0264

PHONE (615) 741-2501

NEWS RELEASE

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**Obesity a health, fiscal hazard for Tennessee**

**NASHVILLE, Tenn.** – Tennesseans are eating too much, exercising too little, and need to shape up to reduce record high obesity rates, according to a new report from the Comptroller's Office entitled "Weighing the Costs of Obesity in Tennessee."

The rate of adult obesity in Tennessee ranked fifth in the U.S. in 2004.

Tennessee's high rate of obesity incurs high health and monetary costs. Obesity is closely associated with several serious chronic diseases and numerous health conditions, including certain cancers, heart disease, stroke, and diabetes. Direct medical costs associated with obesity in Tennessee totaled an estimated \$1.84 billion in 2003, with roughly half of this total borne by Medicare and Medicaid.

But Tennessee lacks a comprehensive plan to reduce obesity rates and evaluate progress. A plan with clear, specific goals and detailed, reliable data could help allocate resources effectively, according to the report.

Recommendations for the state legislature focus on school health program issues, calling for funding additional Coordinated School Health Program sites, boosting the amount of physical activity in schools, and requiring food service directors to obtain certification or credentialing in nutrition. The report recommends the Department of Education employ a consultant to coordinate physical education programs around the state.

The state should also enhance current incentives and develop new programs for state employees seeking to lose weight or maintain a healthy weight.

The report encourages state education and agriculture officials to explore the potential benefits of farm-to-school programs that provide students with fresh fruits and vegetables while opening new markets for Tennessee agricultural products.

"Like most Americans, Tennesseans are consuming more calories, failing to engage in adequate amounts of physical activity, and living in a society with historically low food prices and employment that is more sedentary than the agricultural-based work of past centuries," the report said.

The report is available on the Comptroller's Web site at [www.comptroller.state.tn.us](http://www.comptroller.state.tn.us)

For additional information about this report, please **contact**:

Russell Moore, Senior Legislative Research Analyst  
Comptroller's Office of Research  
615-401-7880  
[Russell.Moore@state.tn.us](mailto:Russell.Moore@state.tn.us)

OR

Doug Wright, Assistant Director  
Comptroller's Office of Research  
615-401-7870  
[Douglas.W.Wright@state.tn.us](mailto:Douglas.W.Wright@state.tn.us)

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